

Statement by International Chief Wilton Littlechild, Expert Member (WEOG Region)

9th Session of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (11th to 15th July 2016)

**Agenda Item: 3 Follow-up to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples including the review of the mandate of the Expert Mechanism
July 11th, 2016**

Good morning to all delegations,

I would like to begin by saying what an honour it is for me to be here representing the WEOG region for my sixth and final term. For me, my work at the Expert Mechanism, and in other international fora has always been about serving people, particularly, the Indigenous peoples of the world.

When the Expert Mechanism was created, it was to fill the need for a body to continue the role played by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, through a renewed mandate aimed at ensuring the promotion and protection of the rights of Indigenous peoples. Over time, we have moved from adoption of the text of the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which was quite a feat in and of itself as many in this room experienced firsthand, to conducting research-based studies aimed at breathing life into these rights, as well as all human rights of Indigenous peoples. We have examined what each set of rights means to advancing the survival, dignity and well-being of Indigenous peoples worldwide. This is the vision I have tried to bring to my work with my colleagues here at the Expert Mechanism.

It is my hope that each of the studies that I have been involved in preparing has had a positive effect on advancing the rights of Indigenous peoples. For example, in the study on the role of languages and culture in the protection and promotion of the rights and identity of Indigenous peoples, we highlighted that the culture and language rights of Indigenous peoples were central to the realization of the right to survival, impacting the very existence of Indigenous peoples.

In terms of the study on the right to participate in decision-making with a focus on extractive industries, the Expert Mechanism highlighted the crucial importance of land rights and the right to self-determination in the context of development. Too often, the perspectives of Indigenous peoples are not adequately considered in this area of business and human rights. In this regard, we prepared a Conference Room Paper on the Ruggie Principles and how they could apply to the rights of Indigenous peoples.

In every study, we have strived to ensure the recognition and respect of Treaties, including, for example, in the Study on the Right to Education, in the Study on Access to Justice and its follow-up study, and in the most recent Right to Health Study. We have also strived to examine how to advance the rights of those most marginalized, such as

Indigenous persons with disabilities, Indigenous women and girls and Indigenous children and youth, in our work.

The World Conference on Indigenous Peoples can be viewed as a culmination of the years of the Expert Mechanism's work to advance the rights of Indigenous peoples. I am very encouraged by the renewed commitment by States to implement the rights of Indigenous peoples as signaled by the Outcome Document of the World Conference. The remaining challenge is to embrace full implementation at all levels.

In conclusion, I look forward to a productive 9th session of the Expert Mechanism this week. I am confident that our discussions that take place will continue to elucidate the meaning and application of the rights of Indigenous peoples. I would like to welcome our new member, Erika Yamada, who brings a new perspective, some gender balance and a wealth of knowledge from her own experience and background.

Hai Hai. Thank you.